

The novel virus continues to challenge our Nation and the world, so we must be prepared. I urge the Senate to pass necessary additional funding for COVID-19 relief so Americans can continue to face this challenge head-on and prevail.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO STEVE A. SCOTT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, this evening, I want to take just a few moments to recognize Pittsburg State University President Steve Scott. His long tenure at PSU—over three decades in total—has shepherded the university through various challenges and a period of growth.

Since taking the helm as president in 2009, he has led through a recession, enrollment and recruitment challenges in a global pandemic.

Early on during the pandemic, as our world was shutting down, I hosted a Crawford County virtual check-in with area leaders. President Scott was on that Zoom call. It was one of the many Zoom calls we have made over the last several years. During that conversation, President Scott said that there were three things to do when leading during difficult times: One, tell the truth; two, give people hope; and three, tell people how they can help. That advice has stuck with me and has helped guide my work and my conversations with Kansans ever since, and it is good advice that we can follow yet today.

But President Scott's legacy is not only marked by challenges. Pittsburg State has seen tremendous growth and opportunity over the past decades: the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts, Block22, the expansion of the Overman Student Center, the Plaster Center, and many other positive developments.

These encouraging things highlight his emphasis on being a good community partner and his success in further integrating the university with the city of Pittsburg, Crawford County, and the region.

If you have ever been to Pittsburg on game day to cheer on the Gorilla's football team, it is clear how well the university pulls the community together.

I have always enjoyed walking through Gorilla Village with President Scott to visit with students and community members—with "Welcome to the Jungle," of course, playing in the background.

It is during these events that it is clear how well he relates to students, how much he cares for them and enjoys hearing their goals and their dreams or, for graduates, what they have accomplished since leaving campus.

I am of the view that we change the world one soul, one student, one person

at a time. Education is one of the most impactful ways we can do that, and I appreciate President Scott's dedication to serving students for the past 30 years.

I also appreciate how closely he has worked with me and my staff to advocate for Kansas higher education and identify ways the Federal Government can invest in the campus to move both Kansans and Kansas forward.

President Steve Scott will be celebrated this Friday in Pittsburg and step down from his position as president in June, but before he does so, I want him to know how grateful I am and Kansans are for his service.

He is a public servant through and through, and I look forward to seeing what he does next. Whatever it may be, I wish him and Cathy the very best.

President Scott, thank you for your friendship. Thank you for making a difference in so many lives. We are grateful for what you have done at Pittsburg State University. Best to you and your family.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KELLY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. PORTMAN. I am here on the floor today to talk about border security, an issue that is intertwined with our national security and, certainly, with the drug epidemic that we see in our communities around the country. We are in the middle right now of the worst border crisis in the history of our country.

This chart tells the story.

Monthly border crossings are at an unprecedented level. Customs and Border Protection reports that there were 164,973 encounters at the border in February. By the way, that is equal to the population of Dayton, OH. Actually, it is far greater than the population of Dayton, OH.

So we have never had this kind of illegal migration into the country—this many people being apprehended. They told us last week that they are seeing over 7,000 migrants per day in this month, in March, and this is while something called title 42 is in effect.

What is title 42?

Well, despite these really big numbers you see here in terms of the number of people being apprehended at the border, under what is called title 42, which is a public health authority—it has nothing to do with immigration, really. It is about public health, and it is in place because of COVID-19. It allows the Customs and Border Protection folks to say: Sorry, you can't come into the United States for public health reasons. And, therefore, they can be turned away.

So that order is in place right now. Here is how that has worked. If you look at this chart, you will see the people who have been turned away because of title 42, in orange. Those are the numbers in orange. Those who have been allowed to come into the country are in blue.

You will see here, at the end of the last administration, in the Trump years, when we had for the most part a secure border, we had very few illegal entries. We had about 75 percent of the people who were coming in who were turned away by title 42.

In this administration, it is closer to about 50 percent. About 50 percent of the people are being turned away by title 42.

Why is this important? Well, obviously, we are making progress on COVID. COVID-19, we all hope, is not going to be here forever. There may be another variant out there, but as we are relaxing mask mandates and telling people that they don't have a vaccination mandate anymore to be able to come to work or travel across our borders, we are hearing reports that the Biden administration may rescind title 42, so get rid of this authority within the next several weeks.

And do you know what? Unless we have a new variant, God forbid, that comes in and causes a new health crisis, they are probably right. Title 42 shouldn't be used in this way because it is a public health authority, not an immigration law. The problem is that if that happens—remember, we already have an unprecedented number of people coming into the country. Look at this chart. If that happens, then all these folks who are being turned away—the orange bars here—are going to be coming across the border also without title 42 in place to have them be turned away. This is why the Border Patrol tells me—and I know the Presiding Officer hears the same thing all the time—that they are already overwhelmed. But they say it will be out of control.

Now, some may argue it is already out of control. But it is going to get a whole lot worse. So they are worried on the border, and rightly so, that the current crisis is going to become far worse.

My two colleagues from Arizona, both Democrats, to my understanding, have just asked President Biden to keep title 42 in place. And I think that makes sense to keep it in place right now because we are not ready for a huge increase of migrants coming across the border. We can't handle the current wave. The information we received from the Department of Homeland Security is that they are planning for a massive increase of migrants when this happens.

I am the ranking Republican—the top Republican—on the Department of Homeland Security oversight committee, called the HSGAC Committee, or Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. We are talking to

the Department of Homeland Security, and they are preparing for a huge increase. But their plan seems to be more about more buses, more planes, and more tents to help expedite the flow of these migrants into the country rather than figuring out a way that an immigration system should work better to be able to say to people: Come legally. Come legally. Please don't come illegally—which is what these numbers represent.

By the way, I am for legal immigration. I think it has enriched our country. I think it is a very important part of the fabric in our Nation. It makes us special. We brought people in from all over the world, including, pretty much, all of our parents and grandparents and, certainly, great-grandparents. Anybody who is in the Chamber, unless you are Native American, you came here or your family came here as immigrants.

But legal immigration, while it should be encouraged, is not the same thing as what we are talking about here. We are talking about illegal entry, people who don't qualify under the legal system. And in all of these countries where people are coming from, others are waiting in line patiently under the legal immigration system.

So America, typically, is the most generous country in the world, year after year, in accepting legal immigrants. Sometimes, that changes based on the refugee flows, and we are seeing the refugee flows today in Poland, as an example. Poland is going to be the most generous country in the world, thanks to the brutal and murderous and cowardly attacks by Putin on that country. But America is a generous country in terms of immigrants, and we should be.

But with regard to legal immigration, we are not just a country of immigrants—that has enriched us—we are also a country of laws, right? So we have to have some laws in place to deal with this illegal immigration. And, of course, it is not just about people coming illegally. It is about all the other contraband that comes across the border, particularly illegal drugs.

So I believe we have to keep title 42 in place for now, but I also agree this is not a long-term solution to the crisis we have at the southern border. To use a healthcare authority to effectively take care of about half the illegal immigration coming across the border doesn't make sense.

By the way, when you see the difference here in the use of title 42, it is because, during the Trump years, they used title 42 for families and for single adults coming over; whereas, here, the Biden administration chose not to apply it to families for the most part. The vast majority of families do not get stopped because of title 42. It is just single adults, which is the vast majority of people coming across the border illegally. So that is the difference in terms of the percentage of use of title 42.

So we have a real problem on our hands. It is already overwhelming, and it is about to get a lot worse. What is the solution?

Well, the solution is to fix our immigration laws. The foundation underneath all this and the problem that has resulted in these numbers is because our immigration law doesn't work. It is broken, and everybody acknowledges that. I don't know a Member in this Chamber who wouldn't acknowledge, at least privately, that our immigration system is broken. How can you look at these numbers and not realize that?

And yet we haven't been able to find a bipartisan way forward. It is very frustrating. What we have to do is we have to look at the underlying laws and why they don't work.

Well, there is one reason, and it is by far the biggest reason. It may not be the only one. You can argue that we should put in more Border Patrol. We should do that. We should have more fencing. We should do that. But the biggest problem is our asylum policy in this country. The administration has implemented the asylum policy in a way that makes getting control of the border impossible.

Now, what is asylum? Well, it is something to help people who really need relief. And it should be used for that, for people who have a credible fear of persecution. So back in their home country, they are being persecuted. They come to America, and they apply for asylum. We have a tradition in America of accepting those people as we accept refugees. It is basically the same standard. But the problem is that people are coming into our country and claiming asylum, going through a long system, which we will talk about in a minute, not qualifying for asylum, and yet staying in our country. And this has caused a huge pull factor where people from all over the world are coming to America because they are told: Gosh, all you have to do is apply for asylum, and they will let you in, and it is unlikely that you will ever have to leave.

That is how the system works now. I mean, that is just the honest truth, and I think if you talk to anybody who is objective about this, they will admit it.

Now, some people think: We should not have the asylum policy act as our immigration policy. These people should just be allowed to come in.

There are some people who believe that. My belief is we ought to stick with the legal immigration system—again, the most generous in the world in most years—and say that, for asylum, let's limit it to people who actually qualify for asylum. Let's not let people misuse the system to gain entry into the United States.

By the way, the people who are misusing it are the smugglers because it is the smugglers who go to the family, let's say, in a country like Ecuador or Guatemala, and they say: Give me a bunch of money—like 10,000 bucks,

which is a lot of money for a poor family in one of these countries—and I will get your kids or you and your kids into the United States and get them in school, get you a job, because America has this crazy asylum policy where you can just do that.

And we will talk about how that works in a second, but that is a pull factor.

I recently went to Latin America and met with the Presidents of Mexico and Guatemala and Ecuador and Colombia. They all said the same thing, which is this: Please change your policies because it is a pull factor. You are taking some of our best and brightest people, and they all want to come to the American border and go across because they know this is how they can get into your country. You have a legal immigration system where people stay here and apply and go through the process. That is fine. But change your asylum policy.

Now, that may surprise some people. People may think: Well, the Presidents of those countries might like when people leave and send money back to their family.

But, no, they don't want to lose all these people, and that is what is happening. Look at these numbers. That is what is happening.

By the way, it is not just people who are from Central America and Mexico.

So here is an interesting chart that I asked my team to put together. These are encounters at the southwest border—so when somebody gets stopped, apprehended by the Border Patrol—of people who are not from either Mexico or the Northern Triangle.

So look at how this has increased. Back in 2018, there were very few people coming across the border illegally who weren't from Mexico or Central America, the so-called Northern Triangle countries. Look at what happens here. You have a huge increase of people coming over the border who are from other countries.

So I was told today that there were people coming over the border this year from 150 countries. You probably heard the stories of people from Ukraine, a country that is under siege by Russia. You can't blame the people for leaving that country. And I have been to Poland, on the border, recently, and I have seen the refugees there. But some of these refugees are actually coming to Mexico and then finding their way to the southern border and coming across the southern border, from Ukraine and also from Russia. And the Border Patrol has confirmed that for me.

So this has ticked up as this conflict continues. Why? Because they know the easiest way to get into America is to walk across the southern border and you claim asylum and you get in.

Now, we have just decided to bring 100,000 refugees in from Ukraine because of this crisis. So maybe that will be a way that more people can come. They don't have to come through the

southern border. But now, they know this is the easy way to come in. And look at these numbers.

So it is not just people, again, from Mexico and Central America. Now, it is people from all over the world. And for some of these people, the Border Patrol is nervous because they come from countries where there are a lot of people who want to do us harm. So people are coming in from countries in the Middle East, as an example. They are concerned and for good reason.

So what happens when you come to the border and you claim asylum?

So, after you tell the Border Patrol that you would like to claim asylum, you then are permitted to come into the country, assuming you meet a basic standard where you say the right things about having a credible fear of persecution, and you get in line for an asylum determination. So you come to Washington, DC, or my hometown of Cincinnati or Tucson, AZ—wherever it is—and your wait is between 4 and 6 years. Others say it is 4 to 8 years because of the appeals process, but let's say it is 4 to 6 years—so an average of 5 years that you are in the United States, waiting for your asylum request to be adjudicated.

What happens during that time period? Well, you are able to work. Your kids are able to go to school. You get embedded into the community, as you might imagine. Some people show up for their court cases; some people don't. They are in the community. They probably feel it is unlikely they will be deported. So it is not a system that works well to have that kind of a lag time.

By the way, there are 1.5 million people in this category—1.5 million people in this backlog. Does this make any sense?

Here is what is most unusual about this process, I will say: At the end of the process, when the asylum adjudication is made, do you know what happens? Most people are told: I am sorry. You don't qualify.

In fact, the latest information that we have from the Department of Homeland Security is that immigration judges granted asylum to roughly 2,400 migrants in fiscal year 2021. These, again, all originated with a credible fear claim, a credible fear of persecution in their home countries—2,400. That is just 14 percent of such cases completed. That would mean, in terms of these cases, these numbers we have here, that roughly 85 percent or 86 percent of the people who applied, who went through the process, were not granted asylum.

Now, I have heard different numbers here, but I have never heard somebody tell me a number that is close to 50 percent. So, the majority of people who go through this whole process wait 4 to 6 years and finally have their court cases heard. Again, in fiscal year 2021, it would appear it was 2,400 in removal. That would be just 14 percent of such cases completed. The vast majority don't meet our standard.

So who are these people? They are economic refugees. Who can blame them for wanting to come to the United States of America? If I lived in one of these countries and wanted to look out for my kids and my family, as we all do, I might do the same thing.

I don't agree with people who say: Oh, these folks are coming over here to use our welfare and to commit crimes. Some of them do—we know that—both of those things, but I think the vast majority of them come here—and I have talked to a lot of them, as has the Presiding Officer. If you go to the border, you meet these people. These are families who are poor and who are looking for a better life, a higher salary, better healthcare, a future for their kids, but they are not coming legally, and that is the issue. Economic refugees don't qualify as asylees. They don't meet the standard to come in under the asylum process. They have to come in under the legal immigration system.

Look, it is a complicated issue, but in some respects, it is really very simple, isn't it? We have a process here in our country now whereby, if you show up to the border and you claim asylum and you get in, there is a very good chance, although you will not have your claim adjudicated favorably, that you will end up being able to just stay in the United States.

There is discussion about how many people are actually deported once they are put into removal. In other words, if they are told they don't meet the standards and are put into removal, are they deported? Well, the priority of Homeland Security—and, again, we are the oversight committee for this—is people who have criminal records and people who are terrorists, who pose some threat to the country. That means, for the vast majority of the people, they are not going to be prioritized in terms of removal. There is also an opportunity to appeal. That is why some people say it is not 4 to 6 years but that it is 4 to 8 years. But let's say it is even 4 years. That is a long time to wait—1.5 million people.

Now, I am told that the administration is coming up with a new rule to help deal with this issue, and I was initially very encouraged when I heard about this.

What I have been asking for, for some time, is a system where we adjudicate these cases at the border as soon as people come across, yes or no. Let people know. If it is no, go back home, and apply legally. If it is yes, come on into the United States. You then are a legal immigrant. Eventually, you qualify for a green card, and eventually you qualify for citizenship because you are an asylee, like a refugee. But let's do that adjudication at the border when people come. That is what the law says. It says people should be detained until they are adjudicated, but it is not what we do.

I have been pushing for Congress to actually fund this effort—it is going to

be expensive—of places where people can be humanely detained during a short period of time while they actually go before an immigration official who can determine, yes, you are in or, no, you don't qualify, rather than waiting years and years, as we do now. Again, 1.5 million people are in limbo who are in the United States.

So I was sort of excited when I heard that the administration was coming up with a new rule for quicker decisions. I think that makes sense. However, I am learning more about this proposed rule. It appears to be another asylum appeal on top of an already backlogged asylum system. This is why I say that: It adds an asylum officer to the process—who is on the border—and when a person comes forward and says "I have a credible fear of persecution, and I want to claim asylum," this individual, who is not a judge but who is an asylum officer and is trained, is able to either approve or deny the case.

The problem is, if you approve the person, the person comes in and, again, eventually gets a green card and becomes a legal immigrant, but if the person is denied, apparently the individual then goes into the regular process and can immediately appeal to an immigration judge. It just adds another layer that can be appealed. So I am concerned about that.

Now, I am told that there will be an effort to speed up an immigration judge's decision under this process. So, if there is an officer at the border who makes the initial determination and if the initial determination is no, then the judge would have to act more quickly than the 4 to 6 years that are currently in place. So that would be an improvement. That would be an improvement if it could be faster, but I am not sure how that is going to happen because the reason it is 4 to 6 years is that there is a 1.5 million-person backlog.

My view would be, as people are coming in, they ought to be adjudicated quickly, yes or no. If it is yes, come on in. If it is no, go back home. That would send a message to the next group who is being told by these smugglers we talked about: You know, just pay me this money, and I will get you into America. Your kids can go to school, and you can go to work.

I fear that, unless we fix this system, it is going to give those human smugglers even more opportunities to encourage unlawful migration.

By the way, this comes at a time when the DHS recently reported to Congress that several million migrants in the Western Hemisphere are getting ready to start their journey to the United States. Why? Because they know title 42, which we talked about earlier, is going to disappear. It is in the orange here. So this is a time when, apparently, there are more people who are thinking about coming. We know as we have seen the caravans and so on. That is not something that we want to go through again. It is a pull

factor, as I said earlier. It is pulling people to the border. It is giving the coyotes, the traffickers, the smugglers the ability to make lots of money and to bring people, again, not just from Mexico and Central America but from all over the world.

By the way, the journey north is a dangerous one. I know everybody has heard about that and has seen that. We saw recently that there was a tractor-trailer full of migrants that crashed, and dozens of people were killed. We know about the sexual assaults of women, girls, boys. We know about the human trafficking that occurs in connection with this. We know about the cartels that are involved with this smuggling and how much they charge people.

By the way, just last year, there were 10,000 requests for Border Patrol help from people who were in distress because they were left in the desert to their own devices. They needed water or they needed food. They needed to be rescued. There have been over 10,000 cases wherein the Border Patrol has gone and rescued migrants who were left by these smugglers in the middle of the desert.

So this is not a system that we should hold up as a good system. This is a system that is broken and corrupt, and the people making money, again, are the cartels.

Drug cartels, by the way, are very involved in this. So it is about people, but it is also about drugs, and we all know this. They know when the Border Patrol agents are being taken offline to process people who are coming into the country, which leaves wide-open gaps for them to transport drugs into America. I saw it when I was down there last year.

I was down more recently also. What I saw was—we were out at night, and a group of migrants was coming, and the Border Patrol was going to that location to stop them and to question them. Meanwhile, the drug smugglers came across. We all heard it on the radio, and you could see it, but what could they do? They were distracted.

Fentanyl is the deadliest of the drugs. This is the synthetic opioid that is killing more people than is any other drug. About two-thirds of the people who die of overdoses in my home State of Ohio and probably in the Presiding Officer's State are dying from fentanyl or from a variant of fentanyl.

It used to come from China—through the mail, for the most part. We did a pretty good job of stopping that, including with legislation called the STOP Act, which I was proud to be a part of. Yet it is like Whac-A-Mole, wherein you stop it here, and it starts somewhere else, and now it is coming in from Mexico. A lot of the analogs and a lot of the precursors are coming from China, still, into Mexico. It is then being made into either a pill or into some other substance that comes into the United States.

I do a lot of work in this area in terms of the prevention and the treat-

ment and the longer term recovery, and I think that that is really the most important part—to stop the demand. But I have got to tell you that it is really hard right now for people who are interested in helping on the treatment side or in law enforcement back home because this stuff is flooding across the border. It means that the supply has gone up, and it means it is so cheap. Law enforcement in Ohio told me that it is cheaper than marijuana on the street—fentanyl—and that it is being pressed into pills that say things like “Xanax” or “Percocet.” Unfortunately, people are taking those pills, not knowing it has fentanyl, and some are dying of overdoses immediately.

Last year in Ohio, we had, unfortunately, a record level of overdose deaths again. In America, the same was true—100,000 people died of overdoses from these drugs. Again, probably 60 percent—two-thirds—in Ohio were dying of fentanyl.

Last year, we had a 40-percent increase in fentanyl coming over the southern border, which is based on apprehensions. By the way, Border Patrol will tell you, when you go and talk to them, that they are not stopping a lot of it because they don't have the ability; they don't have the resources. But it is a true crisis—four times as much as in 2019. According to the CDC, fentanyl and these other synthetic opioids are the biggest dangers.

A few months ago, I was in Nogales, which is south of Tucson, where the Presiding Officer lives. I was there to ride with the Border Patrol and to go to the port of entry and meet with the Border Patrol and customs officials. They are doing an awesome job with what they have—a 24/7 job—to try to protect our Nation from these narcotics and these bad actors, who come from around the world now and try to enter through this vulnerable southern border, and just to deal with the migrant flow that we talked about. It was pretty alarming. They need better equipment. They need help. They need more resources. They need better technology to be able to scan the cars and trucks that are coming in, particularly for the drugs we talked about.

Fentanyl, by the way—a relatively small package—can kill thousands of people, so you can hide this stuff in a car or in a truck much more easily.

Some of the ports of entry have more technology than others, but here is the average: Less than 2 percent of the passenger vehicles and less than 20 percent of the commercial vehicles coming into the United States are scanned for illegal drugs, like fentanyl. Those are the numbers. It is unacceptable. A smuggler with multiple pounds of fentanyl concealed in a hidden compartment, who is going to make hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars on that, has a very good chance of getting across the border without a search. It is not a gap in our security; it is a gaping hole, and it helps lead to this flood of cheap fentanyl and other dangerous

drugs. Last year, Customs and Border Protection seized nearly 10,000 pounds of deadly fentanyl—again, a 40-percent increase from 2020.

We also face challenges between the ports of entry. In Nogales, the Border Patrol Agent in Charge I rode with showed me huge gaps in the fencing and described an overwhelming, record-breaking number of unlawful migrants and drugs coming into the United States and of the urgent need, as he told me, for more agents, more trucks, and more technology, including cameras and sensors. These gaps and broken areas of fencing that need repairs, it is just inexcusable. We should fix them.

By the way, the smugglers know where these gaps are. The human smugglers know well. The gap I saw, there were all kinds of bottles and old backpacks and stuff where people had discarded things as they come across the border. And you could see the trails. You could see the tracks where people had come across because they know where the breaks are in the fencing. So this is a system that is broken.

The difference between what was happening here at the end of the last administration and this system is there were changes in policy that were put in place right away. One widely reported one was the one to stop the installation of the fencing on day one via Executive order.

By the way, fencing alone is not enough. You have to have technology that goes with it. But, unfortunately, they stopped the technology too.

I was in El Paso probably a year and a half ago, and they showed me the gaps in the wall, and maybe 80 percent of the fencing was done; and then 20 percent was openings where, unfortunately, 24/7, the Border Patrol had to be there or else people would just come across. So it wasn't slowing anybody down.

But I focused on the technology because you want the sensors and the cameras and all that. The fence itself is not as effective. In fact, it is not very effective at all if it doesn't have the technology.

They said 90 percent of the technology had yet to be installed because of that decision on day one of the Executive order because it stopped all the technology, too.

And I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and I talk about this a lot. They are for the technology because they understand this is an issue. But somehow, I don't know, this issue just is one where there is a disconnect between the clearly broken system and what we were able to get together and do on a bipartisan basis.

Since the President's inauguration, the southern border has faced the worst unlawful migration crisis we have had. The men and women of the Border Patrol—Customs and Border Protection—I have met over the years are doing the best they can. We need to help them more. They have got really difficult jobs right now.

For the Border Patrol, I am working on bipartisan legislation to increase the number of agents, address retention challenges of the existing workforce—they are losing people—and let them respond faster to humanitarian crises, including having a Border Patrol reserve they can call on where people are qualified and ready to help.

The ongoing crisis at our southern border is clear, and it is persistent. It is not seasonal anymore, if you look at these numbers.

Again, we welcome legal immigrants. We always should. They enrich our country. But we are both a nation of laws and immigrants.

I urge the Biden administration to change course, to fix this broken system, to fix and reform this asylum process that acts as a pool factor to America, to stop these policies that send a green light to the human smugglers and the drug traffickers that leads to so much human suffering and a border that is not secure.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF JANUARY CONTRERAS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate will soon vote on an important nomination to the Department of Health and Human Services. January Contreras is President Biden's choice to serve as Assistant Secretary for children and families.

The Senate Finance Committee is taking a special interest in kids, families, and fresh approaches to strengthen opportunities for them and for America's future.

Now, people have been a little bit surprised that the Finance Committee is taking this big interest because, normally, they think that the Finance Committee deals primarily with big money issues. Taxes and trade would be two examples.

Those are certainly very, very important, and we spend plenty of time working on those. But the committee also feels very strongly that we can't afford to write off the hopes and dreams of our future, which are our kids and our families. We can't afford, as a country, to lose these young minds and these young families, to take away the kinds of opportunities they could have with just a few well-targeted, sensible investments in their future. And when January Contreras is confirmed, that is exactly the kind of work that she is going to be doing: caring for some of the most vulnerable young people in our Nation, those young people who are in the child welfare system.

One of the big challenges in the last few years of the Administration for Children and Families has been the implementation of our bipartisan Family First Prevention Services Act. This was an extraordinarily important law, particularly for kids who are in foster care.

We had, until this law came along, essentially two choices for these kids.

We could send them off to a foster home. Some of them might be good; some of them we know aren't so good. Or we could leave them in a family situation at home that wasn't too desirable. You might have a parent who had been caught up in drugs or alcohol or something else.

What the Finance Committee did in enacting the Family First Prevention Services Act is it said: We have got these two choices over here, neither of them are ideal. What we will do is create a third path, which is the Family First Prevention Services Act.

So, for example, for a family in Arizona—the Presiding Officer's home State—that family would be in a position to stay together but also to receive some of the services—the anti-drug services, the efforts to get people off alcohol and addiction—and keep the family together. Very often, a grandparent would help out.

Family First is, in my view, the future of much of our domestic policy in this country because it means we aren't going to write off our kids and families caught up in the child welfare system.

The bill was bipartisan. Chairman Hatch was then the chairman. I was the ranking member. I think this bill is a once-in-a-generation overhaul of how child welfare works in America.

As I described to the Presiding Officer, before Family First, families, in effect in Arizona and elsewhere, were broken apart by default. In other words, you had the two choices, neither of them very good. Family First—put together on a bipartisan basis in the Finance Committee—recognized that young people grow up better at home, and families have an incredible capacity to deal with the proper support. So we signed Family First to help families stay together whenever it is safe and possible.

As I mentioned, maybe the parent needs a little help with substance abuse or mental health treatment; getting clean will make the home safe and the community often safer.

And, as I have mentioned, I was particularly thrilled that we could look to grandparents once again to step in as a caretaker for their grandkids, because when I was a young member of the other body, I wrote the Kinship Care bill, which was something that really came out of America's churches, where grandparents could step in and provide a compassionate role model and caretaker for the grandkids. The new approach builds that smart flexibility into the system so the kids and families could get the support they need.

In my view, it is especially important right now to help address mental health. The Finance Committee had a hearing today on that. Senator CRAPO and I have vowed to have a bipartisan bill on that. And it is particularly important to have Family First right now because it allows us to address mental health and substance abuse and strengthen families at the same time. This is what families are all about.

Now, implementing the law takes a lot of close collaboration between the Federal Government and the States. It has not been easy. The previous administration made it pretty challenging. But because this is a bipartisan priority for the Finance Committee, we just pushed ahead. And I am especially looking forward to working with Ms. Contreras on that task.

Ms. Contreras and I have some work experience that might be of interest to the Presiding Officer. Ms. Contreras led the Arizona Legal Women and Youth Services, a legal aid organization for children and young adults who have experienced abuse, neglect, family separation, homelessness, and human trafficking.

Before my time in the Congress, I ran the Oregon legal services for the elderly program, a legal aid program specially for seniors. And then the rest of the time I was codirector of the Oregon Gray Panthers helping, again, families and seniors and others. Back then, seniors were constantly getting clobbered by insurance scams and bill collectors, and somebody needed to be there for them. So Ms. Contreras is very, very qualified for this job—qualified to steer Family First into a period of exceptional progress because States are really hungry for this option, the option that makes a big difference because it ensures that we are not writing off our families; we are not giving up on them.

That is something that I think is particularly important to hear from our Finance Committee members because everybody thinks that the committee just focuses on all these things with Big Money, but we are especially interested in seeing nominees like Ms. Contreras come forward.

I think she will do a terrific job as the head of the Administration for Children and Families. She is going to do a terrific job of moving Family First ahead. She had bipartisan support in the Senate Finance Committee.

I urge all Members of the Senate to vote for January Contreras when she comes up later this evening.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON CONTRERAS NOMINATION

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on the nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Contreras nomination?

Mr. JOHNSON. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.